

American Gothic

Grade Level or Special Area: 7th Grade Visual Arts

Written by: (Samuel J. Ayers, Lubbock Christian University/Lubbock ISD)

Length of Unit: (3-5 Lessons)

I. ABSTRACT

- A. The focus of this unit is on Grant Wood's "American Gothic," which is an example of Modern American Painting and "regionalism." Students will gain an understanding of American regionalist painting. After examining "American Gothic" and the life of Grant Wood, students will create a study/copy of "American Gothic." They will also create their own parody of "American Gothic" depicting objects unique to their own region/community.

II. OVERVIEW

- A. Concept Objectives
 - a. Students will understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures (adapted National Arts Education Standards for Grades 5-8 #4)
- B. Content from the *Core Knowledge Sequence*
 - a. Modern American Painting-Regionalists-Grant Wood, *American Gothic* (p. 169)
- C. Skill Objectives
 - a. Perception. The student develops and organizes ideas from the environment. The student is expected to compare and contrast the use of art elements and principles, using vocabulary correctly. (TEKS 7.1.B)
 - b. Historical/Cultural Heritage. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement. The student is expected to analyze selected artworks to determine cultural contexts. (TEKS 7.3.B)
 - c. Creative Expression/Performance. The student expresses ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media with appropriate skill. The student is expected to create artworks based on direct observations, personal experience, and imagination. (TEKS 7.2.B)
 - d. Response/Evaluation. The student makes informed judgments about personal artworks and the artworks of others. The student is expected to analyze original artworks, portfolios, and exhibits by peers and others to form conclusions about formal properties, historical and cultural context, and intent. (TEKS 7.4.B)

III. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

- A. For Teachers
 - a. *Grant Wood* by Mike Venezia (ISBN 0-516-42284-7)
 - b. <http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/americangothic/>
- B. For Students

IV. RESOURCES

- A. Poster print or slide of American Gothic by Grant Wood
 - B. *Grant Wood* by Mike Venezia (ISBN 0-516-42284-7)
- Internet Sites** (Many of these sites have background information and useful visuals of paintings created by other American regionalist painters and painters whose work influenced Grant Wood.)
- C. American Gothic http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_5.shtml

- D. John Steuart Curry painting <http://www.muskegonartmuseum.org/permanent007.htm>
- E. Thomas Hart Benton painting
[http://search.famsf.org/4d.acgi\\$Search?list&=1&=benton+thomas+hart&=And&=Yes&=&=&=Yes&=Yes&=f](http://search.famsf.org/4d.acgi$Search?list&=1&=benton+thomas+hart&=And&=Yes&=&=&=Yes&=Yes&=f)
- F. Hans Memling painting http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/memling_hans.html

V. LESSONS

Lesson One: American Gothic

- A. *Daily Objectives*
 - a. Concept Objective(s)
 - a. Students will understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures (adapted National Arts Education Standards for Grades 5-8 #4)
 - b. Lesson Content
 - a. Modern American Painting-Regionalists-Grant Wood, *American Gothic* (p. 169)
 - c. Skill Objective(s)
 - a. Historical/Cultural Heritage. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement. The student is expected to analyze selected artworks to determine cultural contexts. (TEKS 7.3.B)
 - b. Response/Evaluation. The student makes informed judgments about personal artworks and the artworks of others. The student is expected to analyze original artworks, portfolios, and exhibits by peers and others to form conclusions about formal properties, historical and cultural context, and intent. (TEKS 7.4.B)
- B. *Materials*
 - a. Appendix 1A: "American Gothic"
 - b. Appendix 1-B: KWL chart
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
 - a. none
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
 - a. Display the art print or show the slide of "American Gothic" by Grant Wood (Appendix 1-A).
 - b. Ask students to verbally list what they see in the painting. Record their responses on the board or on butcher paper.
 - c. Ask students leading questions about the couple and the setting (What is the most important thing in the painting and why? What is the artist trying to tell viewers?).
 - d. Using a KWL chart (Appendix 1-B), complete the K (What I know) and the W (What I want to know) portion of the chart. Students can complete their own copy of the KWL as the teacher guides the process using an overhead transparency of the KWL chart.
 - e. Close the lesson by reviewing the title of the artwork ("American Gothic"), the artist (Grant Wood), and involve students in summarizing their observations and impressions of the painting.
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
 - 1. Assessment for this lesson is informal consisting of student participation in the listing activity and the KWL chart.

Lesson Two: American Gothic

- A. *Daily Objectives*
- a. Concept Objective(s)
 - a. Students will understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures (adapted National Arts Education Standards for Grades 5-8 #4)
 - b. Lesson Content
 - a. Modern American Painting-Regionalists-Grant Wood, *American Gothic* (p. 169)
 - c. Skill Objective(s)
 - a. Historical/Cultural Heritage. The student demonstrates an understanding of art history and culture as records of human achievement. The student is expected to analyze selected artworks to determine cultural contexts. (TEKS 7.3.B)
 - b. Response/Evaluation. The student makes informed judgments about personal artworks and the artworks of others. The student is expected to analyze original artworks, portfolios, and exhibits by peers and others to form conclusions about formal properties, historical and cultural context, and intent. (TEKS 7.4.B)
- B. *Materials*
- a. *Grant Wood* by Mike Venezia (ISBN 0-516-42284-7)
 - b. 9”x12” white drawing paper and pencils for each student
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
- a. Regionalism – a movement that aggressively opposed European abstract art, preferring depictions of rural American subjects rendered in a representational style
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
- a. Display the art print or show the slide of “American Gothic” by Grant Wood.
 - b. Refer to the print/slide and the KWL chart (Appendix 1-B) from the previous day. Explain that you will be providing them with some background information about Grant Wood and “American Gothic.” Students may add the information to the L (What I learned) portion of their KWL chart.
 - c. Read aloud *Grant Wood* by Mike Venezia or use information from Appendix 2-A). Make references to regionalist artists John Steuart Curry (Appendix 2-B or <http://www.muskegonartmuseum.org/permanent007.htm>) and Thomas Hart Benton (Appendix 2-C or <http://search.famsf.org/4d.acgi?Search?list&=1&=benton+thomas+hart&=And&=Yes&=&=&=Yes&=Yes&=f>). Make references to Renaissance painters, like Hans Memling (Appendix 2-D or http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/memling_hans.html) who influenced Grant Wood. Display examples of their art.
 - d. Explain that you want students to create a study of “American Gothic.” Distribute 9”x12” sheets of white drawing paper and pencils. Ask students to copy the piece, and encourage them to include many details in their study piece.
 - e. Alternative/Modification: The teacher may consider having students observe and color the “American Gothic” sheet from Enchanted Learning (<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/paint/artists/wood/coloring/amgothic.shtml> or Appendix 2-E) The website allows students to color the page using technology. Display student studies. Critique/discuss their accuracy in copying lines and details.

- f. Close the lesson by involving the students in a summary of Grant Wood’s life and influences.
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
 - a. Assessment for this lesson is informal consisting of student participation in completing their KWL chart. The teacher can also informally assess the students’ hand drawn copies/studies of “American Gothic” and their verbal comments from the critique/discussion.

Lesson Three: American Gothic

- A. *Daily Objectives*
 - 1. Concept Objective(s)
 - a. Students will understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures (adapted National Arts Education Standards for Grades 5-8 #4)
 - b. Lesson Content
 - c.
 - a. Modern American Painting-Regionalists-Grant Wood, *American Gothic* (p. 169)
 - d. Skill Objective(s)
 - a. Creative Expression/Performance. The student expresses ideas through original artworks, using a variety of media with appropriate skill. The student is expected to create artworks based on direct observations, personal experience, and imagination. (TEKS 7.2.B)
 - b. Response/Evaluation. The student makes informed judgments about personal artworks and the artworks of others. The student is expected to analyze original artworks, portfolios, and exhibits by peers and others to form conclusions about formal properties, historical and cultural context, and intent. (TEKS 7.4.B)
- B. *Materials*
 - a. Paper and pen (specific supplies will vary depending on medium students choose for rendering their original artwork)
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
 - a. Regionalism - a movement that aggressively opposed European abstract art, preferring depictions of rural American subjects rendered in a representational style
 - b. Parody - a feeble or ridiculous imitation of a well-known piece of literature, music, or art; to imitate for the purposes of ridicule or satire
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
 - a. Display the art print or show the slide of “American Gothic” by Grant Wood.
 - b. Review “Regionalism” and introduce “parody.”
 - c. Show students examples of parodies (Appendix 3-A) and discuss their similarities and differences.
 - d. Remind students of the Midwestern and farming objects represented in “American Gothic.” Brainstorm elements/characteristics unique to your community and part of the country (What kinds of images are common to our community/area? What are important images unique to our community/area?).
 - e. Have students create a parody of “American Gothic” depicting original characters and/or background elements unique to their community or part of the country. (Students may need two or three days to complete their piece.
 - f. Eventually display the student parodies. Critique/discuss the original artworks.
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*

- a. Assessment will consist of completed artwork parodies created by students.

VI. CULMINATING ACTIVITY

- A. A class gallery exhibiting student studies and parodies of *American Gothic* and/or their original regionalists pieces created in the style of *American Gothic* style can be organized into a hallway exhibit. An opening reception can also be organized on behalf of the student artists. Parents, school administrators, school adopters, and members of the community can be invited.

VII. HANDOUTS/WORKSHEETS

1. Appendix 1-A: American Gothic by Grant Wood, 1930
2. Appendix 1-B: KWL Chart
3. Appendix 2-A: “American Gothic” and Grant Wood
4. Appendix 2-B: John Steuart Curry – Modern American Painter-Regionalist Painter
5. Appendix 2-C: Thomas Hart Benton - Modern American Painter-Regionalist Painter
6. Appendix 2-D: Hans Memling – Renaissance Painter
7. Appendix 2-E: “American Gothic” Coloring Page

VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY (Provide complete bibliographic information and when available, addresses, ISBN numbers and telephone numbers i.e., Hirsch, Jr. E.D. *What Your First Grader Needs to Know*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1991, ISBN 0-385-31026-9

- 1.
- 2.

Slide Ordering Information:

Davis Publications, Inc. 50 Portland Street, Worcester, MA 01608 (1-800-533-2847).

1. “American Gothic” by Grant Wood (AIC-2486)
2. “End Run” by John Steuart Curry (BIAA-352)
3. “Cotton Pickers” by Thomas Benton Hart (MMA-9905)

Appendix 1-A: American Gothic
American Gothic by Grant Wood, 1930

Current Location: The Art Institute of Chicago
1111 South Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60603
http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_5.shtml

**Appendix 1-B: American Gothic
KWL Chart**

KWL Charts may be accessed at: <http://www.squires.fcps.net/library/research/kwl.htm>

What I KNOW	What I WANT to know	What I LEARNED

Appendix 2-A: Grant Wood “American Gothic” and Grant Wood

Grant Wood’s *American Gothic* was painted 74 years ago. Originally, art critics disliked the piece, but the public liked the painting of the couple standing in front of their farmhouse. Over time, it has become one of the most recognized, loved, and imitated icons of American art.

Grant Wood traveled through the southern Iowa countryside during the summer of 1930. As he drove through the town of Eldon, he noticed the modest house with the upstairs gothic-style window. The house had been built during the 1880s, and the window came from a kit purchased through the Sears Roebuck catalog. He was apparently impressed with the simple strong design of the five-room house located across the road from the stockyard.

He quickly sketched the house on a piece of paper and also had someone take a picture of it. His 30-year old sister, Nan Wood Graham, served as the model for the woman, and his 62-year old dentist, Dr. Byron H. McKeeby, served as the model for the man. They dressed in period clothing, and although they are standing together, they actually modeled separately.

Grant Wood worked on the painting for two months, and finished it in time to enter it in a juried exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago. *American Gothic* received a bronze medal and a \$300 cash prize. At the time, some individuals claimed the painting was an insult to plain country people. Others complained about the symbolism of the painting. Grant Wood avoided explaining any specific meaning of the painting.

In a very short time the painting gained popularity. It has become one of the most widely recognized paintings in America. Parodies of the painting did not start until the late 1950s. Since that time, parodies of the couple have been printed in magazines, newspapers, posters, and advertisements. Today, the original *American Gothic* hangs in the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Artist

Grant Wood (1892-1942) was born on a farm in Anamosa, Iowa. While Grant was very young, his father died. He then moved to Cedar Rapids with his mother, two brothers and a sister. Life was difficult, and the family was quite poor.

As a boy, Grant drew pictures of farm animals, trees, farm scenes, and people. While in elementary school, he won a national art contest sponsored by a crayon company. In high school, he drew pictures for the yearbook, and designed stage sets for the school theater productions.

During World War I, Grant served in the army as a camouflage artist. He also drew pictures of his fellow soldiers. He traveled to Europe four times to study art and chose to paint in the style used by the old masters of Europe. He promoted a painting style called “Regionalism,” capturing scenes of everyday American life from the artist’s local area. His compositions were usually simple and contained detailed backgrounds.

It was often difficult to make a living as a full-time artist, so Grant Wood also worked as a teacher. He taught junior high art classes in the Cedar Rapids public schools. He later served as the artist in residence at the University of Iowa.

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Appendix 2-B: American Gothic
John Steuart Curry – Modern American Painter-Regionalist Painter

Tornado Over Kansas by John Steuart Curry, 1929

Current Location: Muskegon Museum of Art
296 W. Webster Avenue
Muskegon, Michigan 49440
<http://www.muskegonartmuseum.org/permanent007.htm>

Appendix 2-C: American Gothic
Thomas Hart Benton - Modern American Painter-Regionalist Painter

American Planting by Thomas Hart Benton, 1940
Current Location: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco
2501 Irving Street San Francisco, California

[http://search.famsf.org/4d.acgi\\$Search?list&=1&=benton+thomas+hart&=And&=Yes&=&=&=&=Yes&=Yes&=f](http://search.famsf.org/4d.acgi$Search?list&=1&=benton+thomas+hart&=And&=Yes&=&=&=&=Yes&=Yes&=f)

Appendix 2-D: American Gothic
Hans Memling – Renaissance Painter

Portrait of a Man by Hans Memling, mid 1470
Netherlandish Northern Renaissance Painter, c.1435-1494
http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/memling_hans.html

Portrait of a Man by Hans Memling, c. 1470
Current Location: The Frick Collection
New York, New York
<http://frick.org/html/pntg23f.htm>

Appendix 2-E American Gothic Coloring Page

From Enchanted Learning

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/paint/artists/wood/coloring/amgothic.shtml>

Grant Wood: American Gothic

Grant Wood (February 13, 1892 - February 12, 1942) was an American artist who painted realistic works. Wood was born and died in Iowa. He studied art in the USA, France, Holland, and Germany. Wood's "American Gothic" was painted in 1930. Wood's famous painting depicts a stern-faced farmer and his daughter in front of a farmhouse (the house is located in Eldon, [Iowa](#), USA).

**Appendix 3-A American Gothic
Parodies**